

## Learning in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

Massive Open Online Courses aim to open access to online learning. Over the past two years hundreds of MOOCs have been set up by universities around the world. Yet little is known about how people learn in MOOCs.

Some MOOCs do not replicate lecture/tutorials – they are open and there are no boundaries - anyone can join. The instructor's role is to input expertise, provide structure and catalyse learning. Learners themselves source knowledge and contribute it back to the course which can then be used by other learners on the course.

The way people learn through the MOOC may seem far removed from how we view learning in the classroom, but in an era of surfing, sourcing, splicing and mixing information, it is a natural way to learn. The real power of a MOOC is that participants learn together. Small clusters form, made up of people interested in specific questions, creating learning groups made up of people new to the subject as well as interested experts. In this type of learning environment, MOOC learners have to be able to take control of - to self-regulate - their learning.

MOOCs also have implications for universities, emphasising global competition and bringing to the fore new funding and business models.

### Method and Participants

This study focused on Change 11, a 'connectivist' MOOC. Twenty-nine participants were recruited for semi-structured interviews exploring their learning behaviour within the course. These participants were also asked to complete an SRL profile questionnaire.

### Research Hypothesis

People who exhibit a high degree of Self-Regulation in their learning (as measured by their SRL profile score) will use qualitatively different strategies to plan, monitor and reflect on their learning in the Change 11 MOOC.

### Research Findings

To date, our analysis has focused on identifying different patterns of engagement that learners on the MOOC adopted. Three patterns emerged:

- **Active Participants** interacted with others in the course through internal networks through microblogging or blogging. They used a range of connection strategies, such as contacting others or commenting on others' blogs.
- **Passive participants** tended to be dissatisfied with the 'connectivist' approach of the course and would have preferred a formal and more structured course. Factors affecting their engagement with the MOOC included confidence and prior MOOC experience.
- **Lurkers** actively followed the course but did not engage with other learners in the MOOC. They may however interact with others outside the course, and applied what they had learned to improve their own practice

Ongoing analysis is focused on goal-setting behaviours and has uncovered evidence that learners who score high for their SRL profile are more likely to articulate different types of goals, that are more challenging, and extend beyond the course itself. Together these findings provide an insight into how individuals approach and learn within MOOCs, and can guide MOOC organisers to improve the design of future courses.

### Research team

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**Website:** <http://www.gcu.ac.uk/academy/srl-mooc/>

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